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ABSTRACT

The objective of mainstreaming is admirable, but the benefits received through a "carte blanche" approach of mainstreaming handicapped individuals into physical education classes are doubtful. Mainstreaming has been attempted in physical education for years, with questionable results and, in many cases, it has been discarded as inappropriate. Several factors must be considered before the doors can be opened to mainstreaming in physical education, including the (a) competencies of the physical education generalist, (b) class size, and (c) proper assessment of the individual before mainstreaming placement is considered. In order to appropriately mainstream the disabled and otherwise handicapped population, effective inroads through preservice and inservice training of personnel in adapted physical education must preclude all other processes. (Author/JS)

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MAINSTREAMING -- A NEGATIVE APPROACH

Mainstreaming is an admirable objective, but is it a realistic approach at the present point in time? To endorse the concept of mainstreaming, several facts must be taken into consideration.

First, historically physical education has endorsed the concept of adapted physical education programs. I assume that every physical educator is knowledgeable of the fact that a committee appointed by the AAHPER (1) wrote a clear definition and guidelines for adapted physical education. Although this has been accepted for years, studies show that a minimal number of public schools offer adapted physical education classes within their curriculum (6, 7, 8). The laws or regulations of many states have historically provided for adapted physical education, but most of these same states have waiver provisions which, in essence, cancel out these programs (12).

It has been the experience of this speaker that in most cases the handicapped child has not been integrated nor segregated in physical education. If the special education teacher has not provided some form of physical education within the classroom (in many cases they do not) the child does not receive any physical education what-so-ever! (11) I am sure those of us who are advocates of physical education for the handicapped have all experienced this same realization. In many cases where the handicapped are claimed to be integrated into the regular physical education classes we find that their involvement is limited to observing the class, carrying out the equipment, or handing out towels to the other students at the end of the activity. If this is the educational experience which the handicapped child is to gain from mainstreaming

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then we had better take a hard look at the purpose of mainstreaming the handicapped child in physical education.

The second fact to consider is how competent is the physical education generalist in providing appropriate programs for the handicapped child in the regular physical education class. It has been my experience that the majority of the traditionally prepared physical education teachers do not feel they are adequately prepared to teach the handicapped child in their classes. It is unusual if they have received more than one theory course in adapted physical education or had any practicum experience at all (6, 7, 8, 11). Usually the theory course, which they may have had, was oriented toward the chronic and/or acute physically disabled and handicapped population. They do not have training for teaching mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed or sensory disorders.

How can we expect to find physical education programs that will be meaningful for the mainstreamed handicapped child if the teacher does not have the background to deal with the problems with which they will be confronted. This is not to say that many teachers are not sympathetic to the handicapped child, but sympathy is different from empathy. "Tender loving care" is needed, but must be combined with appropriate and effectively applied programs to obtain meaningful results.

The third consideration that affects mainstreaming is the age-old problem of class size. With enrollments in physical education classes varying from 25 to 100 students per class, it would be reasonable to conclude that the necessary individual attention that a handicapped child would need to benefit from physical education when mainstreamed is doubtful. The child could be lost in the crowd with his needs not being met or, will "stick out like a sore thumb" which could result in poor self-concept, ridicule by his peer group and his resistance to participation in any type

of physical education program.

Some will present the argument that an individualized program in the regular physical education classes will allow the handicapped child to benefit equally as well as he or she would in an adapted program. I question this because it assumes that the child, who has learning problems, can interpret the instructions as given to the majority of the class who do not have learning problems. It is a great deal to ask the teacher to program for a few to the detriment of the majority or vice-versa, especially when the teacher may not be knowledgeable of the techniques utilized in teaching the handicapped population.

My last concern is that of evaluation. Although I have presented some negative viewpoints to mainstreaming of handicapped, I believe that it is possible to mainstream handicapped children on a selective basis, if appropriate evaluation is made prior to placement but I have not seen, nor heard, of this being done to any great extent. I have often heard - we mainstream the child in art, music, and physical education so that they gain from the socialization with the (quote) "normal" child, but this would be impossible to do in a regular classroom situation. The determination not to mainstream the child in the regular classroom is based on objective and subjective evaluation (5, 9), yet the child is sent to the regular physical education class without prior evaluation to survive on his own in an overt demonstration of his ability which can emphasize his difference rather than similarities with the other students in the class.

Why should we as physical educators be any different from the classroom teacher by allowing a student in our regular classes who has not been evaluated. Why can't we expect to have students who cannot "safely or successfully engage in unrestricted activities of the general physical education program" (2) be placed in adapted programs, staffed by a

specially trained physical education instructor who is knowledgeable of the nature and needs of the handicapped student. Why should not we as physical educators have the same assistance from a physical education specialist as the classroom teacher has from the special educator?

It is interesting to note that in the majority of the states that have enacted laws requiring public schools to provide an education to meet the needs and maximize the capabilities of all children with exceptional educational needs only a few have indicated that this mandate includes physical education (12). I realize that state laws have to be written in broad terms and physical education can be included under that umbrella, but what happens when implementation of the law takes place? In the State of Wisconsin (16) for example, not once have the words "physical education" been mentioned in the guidelines for implementation of the law passed in 1973 (15). When contacted concerning this oversight, the individual(s) in the State Department of Public Instruction indicated adapted physical education could be included but have never publicly supported this position. When reporting the personnel needs of the state for educating the exceptional population to the Bureau of Education for Handicapped (HEW) it was stated in the category for physical education and recreation personnel needed -- "does not apply." (14) How other state departments of education reported their needs for physical educators to service the exceptional I do not know, but, I would venture to guess it was quite similar.

MAINSTREAM the exceptional child in physical education--we have been doing it for years. But, has it been effective? I say NO in the majority of cases. If having the child sit and watch, carry equipment or hand out towels is considered mainstreaming! Until we have educated the physical educators at the "grassroots" level to the nature and needs

of the exceptional child and how to appropriately program for that child we cannot endorse a "carte blanche" approach to mainstreaming and expect the child to benefit from physical education. Once we have made effective inroads through pre-service and inservice training of personnel in adapted physical education then let us talk about mainstreaming the exceptional child.

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